11: Lèques P-5 (1956) 1957 MS37 Senegal

Current Fashion among the Women of Dakar
(Study in Social Psychology)
/La mode actuelle chez les Dakaroises
(Etude de psychologie sociale)/

by R. Lèques

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1964

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121 Fashion, from a subjective point of view, represents a fleeting custom that depends on the taste and the whims of individuals. Its range of application is universal. It is thus a social and aesthetic phenomenon of the same order as painting, from which it borrows much.

Like all expressions of art, fashion is a language and a magic. It is also a technique, the different aspects of which may be grouped in three categories: the fabrication of the objects (fabrics and garments), the methods of sale, and the motivations for the purchase.

For the social psychologist the problem of the adaptation of the African to European fashions presents itself.

125 Among the various possible methods of investigation, our choice was directed first of all to direct observations and the method of tests. We have taken into consideration both the ethnic origin and the age of the subjects.

I. Female African Population of Dakar

162 1. Resident population on 6-1-55.

We ascertained:

a) the very distinct predominance of the Wolof group (47.8%),

b) the weak representation of the Sérèr and Diola in relation to the Bambara.

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2. Characteristics of this population:

[191] [212] a) Knowledge of French (14 years old and +):

4,844 women and girls speak our language (2,850 of them write it).

162 463 [294] [386] b) Salaried occupations in crafts and business (14 years old and +):

3,779, of whom: sewing, dressmaking, lingerie, clothing 609

preparation, dyeing..... 142

S /432 cont./
162
463
[294] Cape Verde group 243
Wolof group 157
W
[294] Diola group 48
Lebou group 31
Sérer group 29
S
W Others 101
[386] The majority of the 142 dyers are Toucouleur /Tukolar/ (77) and Wolof (36).

W Out of 1,455 Wolof women practicing a trade, for their
[463] own benefit or salaried, 598 are tradeswomen, 157 in sewing, 110 business employees.

The Lébou women likewise prefer to carry on a business (150 out of 340 counted as workers).

S
125 II. Experimental Research on the Aesthetic Sense of Dakar Women in the Matter of Clothing

For this study, which is only in its beginnings, two methods are used:

-- direct observation of clothing worn for display by a certain number of women,

-- the result of tests conducted among some of them.

/Table I appears here on an unnumbered page./

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A. Direct Observation.

1. Circumstances.

S
[114] a) The investigation was conducted in the Médina of Dakar, in the quarters Sapeurs-pompiers /Firemen/ and Champ de courses /Race course/ -- between 9 and 19 November 1956, at the end of an election.

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W
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Table I. Female Population of Dakar on 6-1-55.

Ethnic Groups	1-9 yrs. old	10/14	15/19	20/24	25/29	30/34	35/39
West Atlantic Gr.							
Wolof	12 830	2 654	3 629	4 630	5 260	3 561	2 555
Lébou	3 980	912	929	1 181	1 263	865	722
Sérir	1 093	251	495	662	676	289	237
Diola	302	106	231	226	173	109	65
Mandjiak	174	26	101	111	74	34	30
Sarr	261	69	90	76	71	37	29
Kini	39	2	34	26	8	3	1
Kpellé	19	3	13	21	14	3	3
Mankagne	33	11	11	11	7	1	2
Others	146	30	48	57	48	12	16
	18 877	4 064	5 581	7 001	7 596	5 014	3 659
Peul Gr. (N and NE)							
Toucouleur	2 954	545	1 033	1 191	1 366	822	616
Peul	702	142	292	359	348	234	173
Foula	385	61	247	208	168	54	49
Others	614	125	187	257	310	219	146
	4 655	873	1 759	2 015	2 192	1 389	984
Sudanese Gr.							
Bambara	1 045	206	299	290	308	205	158
Serakholé	568	105	190	207	240	150	102
Soni	227	39	45	71	66	37	24
Malinké	260	46	109	77	74	36	23
Khassonké	147	33	38	40	50	29	24
Mandingue	133	17	30	39	30	19	10
Others	39	6	18	19	14	6	8
	2 419	452	729	743	782	482	329
Others							
CI + Bénin	242	38	52	52	63	35	16
Voltaics	122	14	32	44	31	13	5
Haoussa	26	11	11	11	10	4	1
Af., not Fr. W. Af.	71	16	27	25	21	23	11
Cape Verdians	502	159	180	209	188	127	117
Misc.	13	1	1	8	5	1	—
	986	239	303	349	318	203	150
Totals							

/Left half of table/

/Between pp. 432 and 433./

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30/34	35/39	40/44	45/49	50/54	55/59	60/64	65 +	Totals
3 561	2 555	2 007	1 063	1 036	611	608	1 184	41 628
865	722	635	416	370	268	260	496	12 297
389	237	141	78	62	41	34	51	4 212
109	65	47	25	25	10	9	13	1 341
34	30	13	13	1	2	3	1	583
37	29	22	11	7	7	3	5	683
3	1	—	—	—	—	1	—	114
3	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	80
1	2	—	—	—	—	—	—	69
12	16	5	4	4	1	—	1	372
5 014	3 659	2 870	1 610	1 505	940	918	1 751	61 379
882	616	452	231	137	85	86	127	9 705
234	173	130	60	56	20	29	50	2 595
54	49	22	19	3	13	2	2	1 223
219	146	112	63	58	34	34	84	2 263
1 389	984	716	373	254	151	151	263	15 775
205	158	128	76	54	40	22	82	2 923
150	102	67	43	34	22	21	33	1 772
37	24	28	14	6	4	6	5	572
36	23	17	4	5	1	1	6	669
29	24	3	6	4	8	2	2	386
19	10	6	5	6	2	5	3	305
6	8	3	1	—	—	—	3	117
482	339	262	149	109	77	67	134	6 754
35	16	8	7	4	2	3	3	535
13	5	3	3	3	4	1	—	285
4	1	2	1	1	—	1	1	80
22	11	14	11	7	12	4	7	349
127	117	136	141	81	82	33	61	2 016
1	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	30
203	150	164	163	96	100	42	72	3 195
								87 183

/Right half of table/

/433 cont./

125 b) It was concerned with the "outer" garments of 4,772 women 14 years old and + . the majority of them Wolof and Lébou.

291 Except when the principal garment is of transparent material, it is very difficult to distinguish, not the underclothing in the European sense of the term, but masses of draped or fitted material, indispensable elements of feminine dress in tropical Africa.

2. Results.

a) Classical African clothing (boubous):

Table II

Dominant Colors	Voiles Tulles Organdies	Plain	Lace or Openwork	Printed Wax or Fancy	Dyed (Craft)	Woven (Craft)	Totals
Whites	262	117	81	--	--	--	460
Blacks	95	149	23	--	--	--	267
Violets and mauves	115	52	--	244	--	34	445
Indigos	--	106	--	463	426	--	995
Blues	131	15	20	61	--	--	227
Greens	11	24	--	73	--	--	108
Yellows	106	20	--	58	--	--	184
Oranges	11	3	--	100	--	21	135
Reds	20	3	--	28	--	10	61
Pinks	248	3	45	21	--	--	317
Garnets	13	--	--	9	--	--	22
Ochers	3	--	--	6	--	--	9
Maroons	128	16	4	576	--	--	724
Grays	3	--	9	36	--	--	48
Totals	1,146	508	182	1,675	426	65	4,002

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291 177 b) Clothing of European inspiration (tailles-basses and dresses):

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Table III

	Tailles-basses			Dresses							
	Printed	Others	Total	Voiles, Tulles, Organdies, Lace	Plain	Printed Cotton	Printed W. and F.	Dyed	Fibranne	Nylon	Total
Whites	--	16	16	17	24	--	--	--	--	3	44
Blacks	--	--	--	21	22	--	--	--	--	--	43
Violets, mauves	11	--	11	19	5	--	50	--	--	--	74
Indigos	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	33	--	--	33
Blues	11	--	11	31	28	14	37	--	6	12	128
Greens	--	--	--	--	--	26	39	--	--	--	65
Yellows	--	--	--	--	--	--	38	--	7	--	45
Oranges	3	--	3	--	--	--	23	--	--	--	23
Reds	--	--	--	--	--	14	--	--	--	--	14
Pinks	3	--	3	12	5	--	34	--	--	10	61
Garnets	5	--	5	--	--	--	17	--	3	--	20
Ochers	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Maroons	49	--	49	--	--	--	87	--	9	--	96
Grays	--	--	--	--	--	--	26	--	--	--	26
	82	16	98	100	84	54	351	33	25	25	672

/Fibranne designates various artificial or synthetic fabrics whose fibers are short and connected by twisting, in contrast to rayon made of continuous fibers./

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Table IV. Recapitulation by Color

Colors	Total 1	Total 2	Total 3	General Total
Whites	460	16	44	520
Blacks	267	--	43	310
Violets and mauves	445	11	74	530
Indigos	995	--	33	1,028
Blues	227	11	128	366
Greens	108	--	65	173
Yellows	184	--	45	229
Oranges	135	3	23	161
Reds	61	--	14	75
Pinks	317	3	61	381
Garnets	22	5	20	47
Ochers	9	--	--	9
Maroons	724	49	96	869
Grays	48	--	26	74
	4,002	98	672	4,772

The Wax and Fancy printed fabrics are always bi-colored or multicolored. Our tables, however, only include simple colors without variations, because the latter are too numerous. We have therefore classified these fabrics by the color of the background, or by the dominant note registered visually.

/435/ /There is no side-heading numbered 3./

4. Interpretation

a) Colors:

The indigo colors take first place (24.86% of the boubous and 21.54% of the whole), thanks to:

--the quality of the European industry--especially Dutch and English--which permits printing designs.

/435 cont./

291 in vivid and distinct colors on an indigo background, without overlappings.

[288] -- the presence in Dakar of an industry which manufactures "guinées" /cotton cloth/ and "sucretons";

[386] -- the survival of a traditional craft of dyers that still had 142 representatives in 1955.

The family of maroons takes second place (18.09% of the boubous and 18.21% of the whole).

In third place we find the violets and mauves, and in practically the same place the whites (about 11% in each category).

b) Classical African style:

-- Clothing for display, the mboubeu (1), or boubou,

[192]

1. Boubou is an incorrect pronunciation of the Wolof term mboubeu = woman's clothing in general, a full simple tunic.

[177] is always in favor (4,002 as against 770 garments of European inspiration, 83.86% as against 16.14%).

-- But in this category the Wax and Fancy printed fabrics are in regression (1,675 = 41.85% as against 2,412 = 56.52%).

291
177 c) Style of European inspiration:

-- The taille-basse, a kind of blouse that terminates at the waist in a circular flounce 20 to 25 centimeters wide, is combined either with a draped loincloth /pagne, a long strip of material/ or a sewed skirt. Most often the two pieces are made of the same material.

It is worn especially by the young girls (out of 52 women tested, 40 young girls, 25 of whom habitually wore tailles-basses).

-- The dress, worn by women of fashion in African life, is long in 99% of the cases.

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291 It is sometimes difficult to differentiate it from the
177 boubou when it is merely a long, sewed tunic.

It presents different variations (straight, pleated at the waist; round neck, square, etc.; its sleeves plain, puffed .... not reaching below the elbow).

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291 d) Evolution:

In observing the different styles of clothing worn by women of different ages, one has a history of the evolution of the cut in the course of the last 20 years.

Among these 4,772 subjects, we have in fact noted at random: 4 women (from 50 to 55 years old), of whom:

2 wore 1 Fancy print boubou
+ 1 camisole
+ 3 loincloths, of which 1 was made by a weaver
+ 1 Jacquard
+ 1 cotton print

2 -- 1 voile boubou
+ 1 camisole
+ 3 loincloths, of which 1 was from a weaver
1 Jacquard
1 Fancy

4 women from 40 to 50 years old:

2 wore 1 voile boubou
+ 1 cotton-print loincloth
+ 1 Fancy loincloth

1 -- 1 voile boubou
+ 1 Fancy dress
1 Fancy loincloth

1 -- 1 voile boubou
+ 1 Fancy dress
+ 1 Jacquard loincloth

4 women from 30 to 40 years old:

2 wore 1 voile boubou
+ 1 dress

1 -- 1 Fancy boubou
+ 1 dress

/436 cont./

291 1 wore 1 Fancy boubou
+ 1 loincloth

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4 women from 20 to 30 years old:

1 wore 1 voile boubou + 1 Fancy loincloth
1 -- 1 dress + 1 loincloth
2 -- 1 dress

4 young girls:

2 wore 1 taille-basse + loincloth
2 -- 1 dress

Corresponding to this evolution of style, there is an evolution in the choice patterns of printed materials and of the quality of these materials.

When it is a matter of a dress, one sees affirmed more and more the abandonment of large patterns of one or 1.20 X 1.20 meters, and, on the contrary, a choice of simple lines, of flowers, leaves, birds, heightened by a harmony of warm but not gaudy colors.

Similarly, the light cotton fabrics (Citec) are more and more in demand.

B. Method of the Tests.

121 1) General remarks.

"Among the objects that determine positive or negative feelings, one particular category consists of those about which it is said that they are 'beautiful' or 'ugly,' that is to say, of those that do or do not satisfy the aesthetic tendencies." (P. Jampolsky.)

We have asked ourselves, following Mr. Jampolsky, to what extent this "projection" can occasion the application of a personality test.

The apparatus utilized was only meant to furnish, by
125 way of correction, a more complete method.
822 It included:

-- a sheet of straight, broken, and curved lines and of rough sketches of figures in black on white.

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125
822

-- a sheet of simple figures in black on white.
-- 13 colors painted in gouache on cardboards.

Fifty-two women and young girls were subjected to this test. Since they have all been identified among the 4,772 individuals mentioned in the first part of this article, it seemed to us interesting to give here the results of this experiment as far as the color tests are concerned.

/438/ a) Table V

Ethnic Groups Represented by Age

Ages	Wolof (A)	Lebou (B)	Sérèr (C)	Mandjiak (D)	Toucoul. (E)	Peul + Foula (F)	Sarakhulé (G)	Malinké (H)	Sosé (I)	Mandingue (J)	Susu (K)	Totals
14 (1)	1										1	3
15 (2)	4				1				1	1	2	9
16 (3)	6			1				1			1	9
17 (4)	4	1										5
18 (5)								1			1	2
19 (6)	3				1		1					5
20 (7)	4				2							6
21 (8)	1										1	2
22 (9)	1				1							2
25 (12)	2											2
27 (14)	1											1
30 (17)			1		1							2
35 (22)	1											1
36 (23)						1						1
41 (28)								1				1
49 (36)								1				1
	28	1	1	1	6	2	1	4	1	1	6	52

b) Tests used:

/438 cont./

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822

Description.

Presented on cardboards of 7 centimeters by 9 centimeters, colored on one side with gouache.

C1 = violet, C2 = indigo, C3 = blue (royal)
C4 = green (Veronese), C5 = yellow (bright gold),
C6 = orange, C7 = red.
C8 = black, C9 = white
C10 = dead leaf, C11 = chocolate
C12 = yellow ochre, C13 = brick red.

/Table VI appears here on an unnumbered page./

/439/ Process

-- The first 7. Questions: a) which are the two colors that you prefer? b) which is the color that you like the least?

-- Add C8 + C9 to the first. The same two questions.

-- It is then asked that two colors be matched (the most beautiful combination possible). Take 1.

-- To the first 9 colors add: C10, C11, C12, C13. Same questions as above.

-- Make a new combination out of the 13 colors: Take 2.

-- With the elements of these 2 combinations make a final combination considered "the best."

It is obvious that this question is not asked when Take 1 = Take 2.

822 3) Results.

a) Simple choice. Rough balance color by color -- out of 52 individuals, each giving six replies in favor (+) and

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822

Table VI. Color Test Results by Ethnic Group and Ages

Colors	A1	F1	K1	A2	E2	I2	J2	K2	A3	D3	H3	K3	A4	B4	H5	K5	A6	E6
C1	1	1	1	4		2			5			1	3	0	1	2	4	2
C2	00	000	0	000				00	0000		000		0	1	0	00	1 000	
C3		2	1 0	3		2	1	2	5	1	2	1	2	1	1	0	1	1
C4	0		1	4	1 00		2		6 0			1	1	1			1 0	
C5	1		0	2 0	1		0		000	1		0	2 0000	0			1 00	1
C6				00000	00	0		2	0000000	1 0			1 000000	1			0	00
C7			1	1			2	2	2 00		2		2		2	2	1 0	0
C8	2			2 0	1		0		7	0	1	0	5	0			1	1
C9	1	2	1	1	1		1	0000	3	1		1	2	1	00		2	
C10				2	0	1		2	4	1		1	2		1		2	1
C11	1					1			2	0			1	1		1	1	
C12				00	1		0		0	1		0	0				0	
C13			1	4	1			2	2		1	1	1			1	2	
	9	9	9	26	9	9	9	22	54	9	9	9	26	9	9	9	27	9

Legend = C1, C2, ... C13 = colors as defined on p. 438 above. The capital letters = ethnic groups; the figures coupled with the capital letters = ages (cf. Table V).

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Table VI(cont.)

H5	K5	A6	E6	G6	A7	E7	A8	K8	A9	E9	A12	A14	C17	E17	A22	F23	H28	H36	Totals
1	2	4	2	1	4	1	3	1		1	3				0	1		0	+ 42
					0														— 4
		1			1					1					1				+ 5
0	00	000		0	0000	000			000		000000	00		0			000	0	— 49
1		1	1	1	5	2					1	2	3	1	2		3		+ 49
	0					0													— 3
		1			1	4	1	1			3		3				2	1	+ 34
		0		0	0					0				0		00			— 11
		1	1		3				3					1			1	1	+ 18
		00				0	000	000								0			— 22
				1		1			2		2							1	+ 13
		0	00		000					00		0	000	0					— 35
2	2	1			2	2		1				1		1		1			+ 27
		0	0		0										00				— 7
		1	1	1	1			1		1	1	1		2	1	1		1	+ 22
																			— 5
		2			2		1			1		1				1			+ 23
00					00														— 8
1		3	1	1	3	1	1	1		1	2				1	1		1	+ 31
																			— 1
	1	1			1					1				1	1			1	+ 13
				0															— 2
				1															+ 3
		0				0												0	— 9
	1	2			1	1		1	1			1				1			+ 22
																			— 0
9	9	27	9	9	36	18	9	9	9	9	18	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	+312 —156

1

/right half of Table VI/

1 [these four columns duplicate those found on p. 13 - ANALYST]

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822 three replies against (-), making a total of 312 + and 156 -, one obtains the following results:

Table VII

Blue	+	49	Indigo	-	49
Violet	+	42	Orange	-	35
Green	+	34	Yellow	-	22
Black	+	32	Green	-	11
Dead leaf	+	31	Yellow ocher	-	9
Red	+	27	White	-	8
White	+	23	Red	-	7
Brick red	+	22	Black	-	5
Yellow	+	18	Violet	-	4
Chocolate	+	13	Blue	-	3
Orange	+	13	Chocolate	-	2
Indigo	+	5	Dead leaf	-	1
Yellow ocher	+	3	Brick red	-	0

Taking into account the replies -- we are adopting the following classification (brick red is in 5th place):

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Blue	+49-3 = 46 (1)	Indigo	-49+5 = -44
Violet	+42-4 = 38 (2)	Orange	-35+13 = -22
Dead leaf	+31-1 = 30 (3)	Yellow	-22+18 = -4
Black	+32-5 = 27 (4)	Yellow ochre	-9+3 = -6
Brick red	+22-0 = 22 (5)		
Green	+34-11 = 23 (6)		
Red	+27-7 = 20 (7)		
White	+23-8 = 15 (8)		
Chocolate	+13-2 = 11 (9)		

It should be noted:

-- the + choices shown (6 colors = 60.23%);

-- the concentration of the - choices (3 colors = 67.94%);

/440 cont./

822 -- a single color has no — (brick red);

-- 3 controversial colors: yellow, yellow ochre, and orange -- family of "coppers" --

Yellow ocher + 3 - 9 =
Yellow + 18 - 22 = } + 34 = 66
Orange + 13 - 35 =

-- the 3 shades of the family of maroons: dead leaf, chocolate, and red brick are relatively prized: all together + 31 + 13 + 22 = 66 (21.15%).

b) Simple choice. Replies in detail.

If one studies the replies in detail, one finds:

a) a single subject has concentrated her choice: + on 2 colors
b) 4 subjects have concentrated their choice: + on 3 —
11 — showed + on 4 —
17 — — + on 5 —
19 — — + on 6 —
c) 13 subjects have concentrated their — choice on 1 single color.

c) Replies in detail according to ethnic groups and ages:

The number of subjects is too small to permit one to draw serious conclusions. Only the Wolof group is represented by 28 persons, 53.8%, but divided into 11 ages; 6 Toucouleur into 5 ages, and 6 Susu into 5 ages.

The same is to be noted for the ages, of which those best represented, 15 years old (9 subjects) and 16 years old (9 subjects), are not the most significant.

The result shows more + choices even /441/ here. The same is true in the group 20 years old (6 subjects), 17 years old (5), 19 years old (5). The only Sérère woman 30 years old concentrated her + choice on two colors, green and blue, and her — choice on orange.

d) Complex choice (construction).

This is a matter of combinations that the subject is called upon to make. These combinations, selections of two colors, are made after the indication of + and —.

They are made = from among the first 9 colors.
from among these 9 + 4 = 13.

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822 Results:

Blue and white	22
Violet and white.....	12
Black and white.....	12
Red and black	8
Red and white.....	6

It is necessary to note immediately the presence of white in 56 combinations, namely, 35.8% of the total.

According to ages, the proportions remain identical with those of the final table.

The same is true of the classification according to ethnic groups.

Out of 52 subjects, 9 have repeated 3 times the same combination of 2 colors, 26 have done it 2 times.

[291] Out of these 35 subjects (10 married women and 25 young girls), 25 wore clothes for display of which the dominant notes conformed to the preference expressed at the time of the test.

III. Perspectives.

291 "Color is a more emotional and primitive variable than form. /It/ marks the peculiar and significant tendencies in each sex and develops from before adolescence." (P. Jampolsky.)

It would seem, then, more than the design of the motif and the cut of the garment, to be the essential cause of the variability of individual choice in the matter of fashion.

The 1,000 motifs or so (including the variants of the same pattern) put out last year on the Dakar market by the /442/ importers of printed fabrics have brought into play more than 60 different colors, which seems to confirm the preceding point of view.

121 How to determine the ecological and cultural influences in the matter of the individual choice of color with both an aesthetic and useful aim? This presupposes a preliminary definition and delimitation of this milieu, which is the object of a study in progress. /Figs. 1-3 appear here on unnumbered pages./

11: Lèques--18 P-5 (1956) 1957 MS37 Senegal MS37

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Fig. 1. Boubou in white voile and dress in Fancy material (Médina, Dakar).

(Lartéguy photo and plate.)

11: Lèques--19 P-5 (1956) 1957 MS37 Senegal MS37

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347
443

Fig. 2. The Kaolack market for dresses (Lèques photo and plate).

11: Lèques--20 P-5 (1956) 1957 MS37 Senegal Ms 37

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Fig. 3. Taille-Basse (Dakar) (Lèques photo and plate).